

DEC 6 1973

Office of the  
Executive Vice President

BUILDING FOR BROTHERHOOD  
43 WEST 57TH STREET  
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10019

THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CHRISTIANS AND JEWS, Inc.

(212) 688-7550

May 10, 1972

SUBJECT: FOLLOW-UP ON  
NATIONAL STAFF CONFERENCE

Dear Colleague:

You have already received Perry Lusk's excellent report of the SRAC sessions of the Council and with the total staff at our National Staff Conference, March 26-29. Perry did a splendid job and I know you are as grateful as I am for this important record of the SRAC proceedings at that time! Now we must move ahead to implement these discussions.

Julia Washington, our esteemed SRAC Chairman, in her memo of May 2 has also reported to you in essence the general reaction of the staff to the Conference when she said "from the numerous comments and letters received from staff following our meeting in Philadelphia, it was without a doubt the most effective staff meeting in our history." The 80 or more letters I received from staff members verify this and I appreciate deeply your enthusiastic response. I think we moved ahead as an organization and found a new unity and strength during those 3 strenuous days.

As I promised you, I am also pleased to send you 3 additional items as a follow-up to the Staff Conference:

1. A brilliant Summary and Assessment of the Conference by our beloved colleague Dr. Harold Lett. We are all indebted to Harold not only for his eloquent and moving oral presentation of this Summary but also for taking the time to painstakingly put it on paper for us so we have a permanent Summary for our files. I hope you'll take time to read this document for it will refresh your memory and bring back the Conference to you vividly. Thanks, Harold, for a great job!
2. The full text of the splendid motion, unanimously adopted by staff, signifying determination to move NCCJ ahead forward financially and programmatically in the next 5 years - the motion first eloquently proposed by Dr. Peter Mellette on Monday, March 27 at our Plenary Session on SRAC business and subsequently refined by Dr. Leonard Aries into the splendid statement I am enclosing. We are grateful to both Pete and Len for this important contribution!

N. J. REFERENCE DIVISION - LD  
Free Public Library, Newark, N. J.

## SUMMARY

Proceedings of the Annual Staff Meeting of the  
NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CHRISTIANS AND JEWS  
Sylvania Hotel, Phila. March 26-29, 1972

### Ladies and Gentlemen - My Friends:

I am sure you are aware of the difficulties one encounters who would presume to summarize the course of discussion within such a knowledgeable and committed group of professionals as this. Added to the natural difficulties which this task imposes, is the handicap created by my volunteer "public relations staff" that has induced in you, in all probability, an expectation level impossible for me to meet.

Despite the tremendous regard in which I hold the erudition and proficiency of our NCCJ professionals, I must confess that it has been a new and refreshing experience to see you descend to the humble, thoroughly human and lovable weakness of nit-picking on points of salary ratings and staff relations - and to rejoice in your momentary recourse to petty but non-contentious politics!

Your Executive Vice President, David Hyatt opened with a statement to the effect that here in this conference we are confronted with the creative opportunity and the challenge to dedication, "to assist in bringing equality of opportunity and justice to all Americans," by making NCCJ the sharpest, keenest, most dynamic and hardest-hitting of all human relations organizations.

The guest speaker, the Hon. A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr., gave a scholarly review of little known historical facts of the institution of human slavery in America, as background for a hard-hitting analysis of the negative influence of current political leadership, and double standards under the Law, all of which stem from the original, legally sanctioned evils of traffic in human flesh and blatant disregard of basic family ties.

"I believe, really believe that we in America are at the Crossroads," he said, "but if we can resist accepting a lot of phony rhetoric, we can solve our problems."

The Judge's well-documented presentation provoked lively discussion, giving clear evidence of inner-searching on part of his hearers. "Are we a sick society?" we asked; "then it is NCCJ's mission to bring healing influences by being much more knowledgeable about this historical background out of which the sickness has come" was a tacit agreement. Our No.1 problems as a nation, said one, is how to end racism - a task that resembles trying to empty the ocean with a teacup. Yet, it was acknowledged, too, that many others reacted to the problem in a "let's avoid it because it is so overwhelming" kind of way.

Although the initial course of discussion pointed specifically to black-white relations, we were reminded that the problems of Chicanos, Puerto Ricans and Indians were as desperate in many respects.

In the face of a few questions and observations that may have suggested skepticism, cynicism or defeatism, Judge Higginbotham reminded the body that first of all we must have and utilize authentic data - and be intelligent in its use; secondly, that we be aware of the impact of traditional color-consciousness that makes failure of a black-directed program or business, or incidence of black-inflicted crimes, loom so much larger and much more damaging than similar events perpetrated by whites, much of this being due to a more emotional type of reportage in the public media.

The prevailing note attending the closing of this session seemed to me to be best reflected in a confessional appearing in the Protestant Book of Prayers which states:

"We have done those things that we ought not to have done, and we have left undone those things that we ought to have done, and there is no health in us."

The President, Dr. Sterling W. Brown, in a brief but stirring presentation, opened upon the current emotional, political issue of school busing. Citing experiences and statistics which highlighted the irrational nature of opposition to this court-ordered relief for ghetto-bound minority youth, Dr. Brown appealed to conference members to keep minds and hearts on the issue of quality education for black, white, Indian or Spanish-speaking children. He reminded the group that busing of American children has gone on for many years past, without opposition; that over 19 million - or 42% of all public school children - are being bussed to school daily during the school year; that inclusion of parochial and private school children would bring the percentage to 62% of all American children arriving at their school doors by way of busses. In addition, he spoke of the untold thousands of city children who make their way to and from school by subway and public surface carriers. It is only the cardinal sin of transporting black children to predominately white schools, that has aroused the tide of opposition to "busing".

It has been the tragic picture of craven abdication to note the desperation with which erstwhile "liberal" politicians have mounted the Wallace bandwagon, from President to Attorney General to Vice-President to Senators and a plethora of presidential candidates. So we observe the painful and dangerous drama being re-enacted of the voice of the demagogue - the acknowledged advocate of reaction - civilization's Bad Boy - setting the pace in so-called democratic politics and modern social practice. Meanwhile, many half-hearted, self-seeking spokesmen for peace and brotherly love silently kneeling at the altar of hate. Does this statement affect all of us practitioners in Human Relations in such a manner? Certainly not! Because all of us have not as yet resolved our ambivalence, our obedience to outworn tradition, our uncertainty as to our loyalties, be they to God or Mammon!

A large part of this ambivalence, as our speaker implied and as our President proclaimed, is an inability or unwillingness to study and analyze the real issue of busing as a single, minor and temporary expedient measure toward achievement of quality, integrated education. The specious argument that Blacks - some Blacks, a few Blacks - in moves of unconscious defensiveness, reject busing, too, is a shallow, unconvincing, shameful attempt to escape an issue.

It will be well for all of us to remember, as some of our discussion groups are unwittingly disclosing, that every successful program which today we admire, was at one time forbidden territory to the professionals of an earlier day, those who possessed the keener perception, the livelier imagination, the bolder initiative, and above all, the practical, realistic brand of courage which dared to improvise in areas demanding advocacy and service. As our culture attempts to cope with great and rapid change, we dare not risk drifting into the category that would make of us "one of those timid souls who knows neither victory or defeat" as expressed by one of our confreres. Another participant offered the admonition that "even the most timid rabbit is not afraid of a dead issue."

I regret that our first dinner meeting did not give us time enough to have Sergeant Hubert Williams of Newark, president of the National Association of Police Community Relations Officers, tell of the plight of the Black Police officer in almost any city in the land - an obscure but dangerous role of coping with the worst manifestations of bigotry - internal, intra-professional bigotry; external intra-racial intolerance - creating a demand for personal courage and sacrifice few of us can know. These and other personal commentaries I can bold to make within the family, in keeping with the admonition with which the SRAC session was opened, viz: "It is important that we exemplify the right attitude, the right spirit, and that we keep before us the ideals of openness, honesty and trust."

Despite my earlier facetious reference to organizational politics, I was deeply impressed with the intelligence, forthrightness and dispatch with which the business of the Staff Relations Advisory Committee was conducted. It was a creditable example of Participatory Democracy, in truth.

In the very active session on Program Priorities, the many difficulties inherent in the NCCJ task were revealed, including both the obvious and the more obscure roadblocks to success. Perplexed and confused by the rapidity of drastic social change, conference members engaged in objective review of seemingly insurmountable obstacles created by emotional response to demagogues - black and white - to politicians and to ordinary citizens speaking out of their rumor-laden sources of misinformation. Polarization, not only of inter-racial and intra-racial groups, but of white ethnic, occupational and economic groupings, is the frightening picture playing upon the national screen. Intensification of problems of providing adequate, integrated housing, and their direct impact upon employment and educational opportunities, seem to be creating an impossible burden for human relations workers to bear. That notes of despair, of

exhaustion, of apparent cynicism, could be heard occasionally throughout the conference, however muted the tone, was neither unusual nor indication of widespread acceptance of defeatism. The contrary seemed to be true. Who among us whose experiences reach back beyond World War II, will not have had many such moments of deep concern. It is a tribute to the quality of workmanship you represent, that the predominant note is that of responding to challenge, with courage, hope and constantly increasing knowledge.

While inevitably a considerable amount of discussion was in the subjective realm, there were numerous program challenges presented from which choices could be made objectively in fixing priorities. Continuing education of staff rated high on the list. Continuing work with Law Enforcement groups, and utilization of available Federal grants to this end; greater emphasis on Youth work, beginning in Junior High School and carrying over into Police and Youth confrontation; review and planned redistribution of national administrative functions; utilization of National and Regional Board members in program areas and in addition to fund-raising activities; greater emphasis by NCCJ in Human Relations training of teachers and counsellors, and attention to their bi-lingual skills; more active involvement in the education of community leaders in the inevitable affect upon American life that segregated housing will continue to have; seeking out scholarship aid by which campus youth leadership may be mobilized and directed; and maintaining a healthy concern for the need of constant review of NCCJ policy on pressures relating to political issues and the "Honest Broker" role, were among the many concrete areas of discussion. Whether or not this latter issue - the "Honest Broker" label - may be used as an avenue of retreat or escape was one of the many other ideas discussed in these group sessions. The Church has abdicated its role of moral leadership for generations - for centuries - upon this very convenient ground.

Implicit in many of the arguments for involvement of NCCJ in crucial social and political issues (the latter note being distinct from "political action"), was the obvious need for a strong, knowledgeable and persistent voice to give answer to the merchants of fear and hate who are presently monopolizing the public spotlight. It is not the Voice of the American People being heard on picket lines and anti-busing caravans. It is only some of the American people so involved - probably but a tiny minority. Who and where are the others? Do we know; do we care; do we dare conclude that Governor George Wallace - or King Richard himself - speaks for all of them? President Nixon presumed to claim "The Great Silent Majority" as his cohorts not too long ago. May they not be people, confused as even we may be, who are waiting for more enlightenment, more encouragement, more rational leadership? It seems to me that this is what our discussion groups have had as their hidden agenda.

Fund raising has always been an esoteric and frightening art or science to me. I failed to cover the session dealing with this realistic part of NCCJ programming, but I rejoice in knowing those who claim this profession and have fulfilled its demands so efficiently through the years. I leave to them the task of unfolding the mysteries of their craft.

The dinner session devoted to discussion of Interreligious Relations provided a demonstration of thorough-going analysis and reporting of a situation, once considered in excellent state of repair, but almost overnight seemingly, reduced to its earlier state of grave concern - Christian anti-Semitism and an extensive list of disturbing by-products. Fortified by a rich journalistic background, informed by unassailable sources of information and data, and presenting her subject in an objective and dispassionate report, Lillian Block again showed herself to be an outstanding member of her craft, and an invaluable reservoir of knowledge and sensitivity for all of us. Without offering either statement or implication to such effect, she in essence served to warn us all not to permit the dramatic impact of buses, schools, jobs, housing, etc., etc., to dull our consciousness as to the original purposes for which NCCJ was founded - the war on religious bigotry. The substance of her paper must appear upon the desk of every Regional Director as a reminder of an unfinished task of incomparable magnitude. I paraphrase a popular TV commercial which shows a character asleep at his task, who is slapped awake by a lotion-dispensing companion; I say to Lillian for all of us who have been duly smitten, "Thanks, Lillian, we needed that."

New Directions and Innovative Program Techniques was a topic inspiring some very straight talk. To what degree do we find ourselves preoccupied with new terms, new labels, new aspects of old problems appearing in what seems to be new garb? Is the note on Ecology the sound of the Pied Piper to us? It has little or no meaning to ghetto-bound people - and there are so many of them. NCCJ Founding Fathers spoke out against that which, within the framework of religious commitment, was contrary to moral and democratic principles. NCCJ Founders did not go out to negotiate the problems of bigotry, we are reminded. They went out to speak and work against that which was contrary to moral and democratic principles - and these were considered to be non-negotiable as are a multitude of problems which now surround us. Could not a misdirected emphasis on "innovative programming" lead us away from our goal when actually the demand upon us is to reach people in a fashion that is "purposeful" and effective? It would seem to me, in reflecting upon this phase of discussion and in perhaps too great a preoccupation with a semantical trap, that the panel dealing with this topic was much more concerned with avoidance of "old" ideas, "old" methods, "repetitious" performances that have failed to produce adequately in past purposeful grappling with old problems. Could it be that in actuality we are wrestling with methods that through inefficient, diluted repetition, have offered us the temptation of avoiding optimum utilization of our imagination and skill.

The society in which we now have our being, with its proliferation of new groupings and interests, will no longer tolerate unimaginative and uninspired leadership. A realistic assessment of burgeoning problems of Central City, of the reportorial, editorial and personnel practices of communications media, of growing needs of law enforcement agencies for a strong civilian influence in their operations - and a broadening of our concerns with Labor, Management and Public Interest developments, are just a few of the areas considered under this general topic of "Innovative" programming. Surely, enough to test the skills of the most ambitious among us.

I have endeavored to sift from among the immense volume of thoughts expressed in three days of conferencing those which struck me as being the more significant. Such an attempt is obviously the height of presumptuousness - yet, there it is - the best that time allowed me for recording, translating and meditation. Throughout the conference, there has been wide, active and thoughtful participation on the part of the staff - and yet, as always, there were many who offered only silence, perhaps to compensate for those whose active, questing minds demanded of them even more participation. Who among us dare be critical of either? I am positive that this demanding assignment given to me was a Machiavellian design to keep me from joining the latter group - except for the honor granted me to live this gratifying moment.

To one of the grandest collection of human beings with whom it has been my privilege to be associated, I extend my humble, loving expressions of gratitude. It is the knowledge that such people have dedicated themselves to this work that serves to protect me from the sadness of cynicism and hopelessness. That you have registered your concern with formulation of a 5-year plan, is highly commendable. Your objective of planning, expanding and accelerating program will give each of you a kind of focus that should provide an historical landmark in the growth of the organization, and in enhancing the value of NCCJ efforts. More power to you!

#####